

FREE WILL AS CREATIVITY

Putting an end to a pseudo-problem

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PREFACE

The so-called free-will problem is a pseudo-problem made up of a bunch of errors. First there is the insidious error of confusing free will with freedom of choice. Next there is the grave error of unquestioning acquiescence in the fiction of causal determinism. Then there is the ‘error’, rather the self-willed blindness on the part of philosophers underlying the unbelievable ubiquitous denial of the reality of human freedom, spontaneity, and creativity, a reality of which everyone of us has immediate self-evident cognizance.

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in the following issue but regrettably that brave short-lived philosophical online journal expired before that issue saw the light. An abridged version was published in *Philosophy Pathways*. The complete original paper is included in *The Sphinx and the Phoenix* (2009).

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PART ONE

HISTORICAL SURVEY

The so-called free-will problem is a spurious problem. It need not have arisen but for two unjustified assumptions (or two classes of assumptions). The ancient Greek philosophers did not raise the problem since they had no reason to question the reality of the experience of free will. Even the deeply rooted and widely accepted notion of Fate did not radically contradict the experience of free will. Fate (or the Fates) could plot a person's fortunes and the caprice of the gods could bring about the undoing of an individual but they did not work on the will of that person. Prometheus (even had he been human) could maintain his integrity and his dignity in the face of mighty Zeus.

For Socrates and for Plato the problem was, What sways the decisions of a human being:

reason, or emotion, or desire? But in all cases the final arbiter was the person herself or himself. To them, that a rational being acts freely was self-evident. Socrates' examination of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras*, Plato's distinction between volition and intention in the *Laws*, Aristotle's discussion of intentional and unintentional acts in the *Ethica Nicomachea*, all relate to the problem of choice, not to the problem of free will as it was later posed, first by Christian and Islamic thinkers with reference to the ideas of predestination and divine foreknowledge, and then by modern philosophers with reference to the scientific concept of causal determinism. (See section 4 below for the distinction I draw between free will and choice.) Neither Socrates nor Plato nor Aristotle finds any reason to question the reality of the freedom of the will. For them to be free meant to act intelligently and not be swayed by desires and aims unilluminated by the light of reason.

The Atomists of classical times (Democritus, Leucippus, Lucretius) apparently did not pay much attention to any possible repercussions of their theories on the question of human freedom. Plato at *Laws* 967a says, "'Tis the common belief that men who busy themselves with such themes are made infidels by their astronomy and its sister sciences, with their disclosure of a realm where

events happen by stringent necessity, not by the purpose of a will bent on the achievement of good” (tr. A. E. Taylor). But Plato here ties the postulate of physical necessity with atheism, not with any scepticism concerning free will. In any case Epicurus (who adopted the physical theory of Democritus and Leucippus) was confident we can control our fortunes.

The Stoics believed that all that happens is providentially directed, but they did not see that as precluding the freedom of a human being to live in harmony with the divine will.

Monotheism does not hold merely that – in the words of Thomas Aquinas – “God is the cause of the operation of everything which operates.” That would not preclude autonomy as understood by Spinoza. But monotheism in the main, Islamic as well as Christian, maintains further that God has decreed beforehand all action that would ever take place. That clearly makes human beings sheer automata on a par with the animals of Descartes. Monotheists exert themselves to prove that God’s foreknowledge does not determine the deeds of human beings. Permitting them all their subterfuges, what do they gain when, on the other hand, they positively affirm that all we do is foreordained by God?

From the seventeenth century onwards, the

debates about free will and predestination, originally raised in the theological arena, were given new life as a result of the mechanical determinism of Hobbes and Descartes and the metaphysical necessity entailed in Leibniz' pre-established harmony and Spinoza's rationalistic pantheism.

Hobbes (1588-1679) was a consistent materialist. Taking his stand on the naturalistic and materialistic attitude of Francis Bacon (1561-1626), he was perhaps the first among moderns to give clear expression to the idea of causal determinism. If all there is in the universe is matter in motion, then free will can be nothing but an illusion. "When in the mind of man, Appetites and Aversions, Hopes, and Feares, concerning one and the same thing, arise alternately; ... the whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears, continued till the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call DELIBERATION." Further on we read, "In Deliberation, the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhæring to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that we call the WILL; the Act (not the faculty,) of Willing." (*Leviathan*, Part I., chap.VI, Everyman, 1914, 1924, p.28.) This, I say, is consistent materialism. And Hobbes is still very much with us today. As long as we find reality in what is given in the phenomenal

world, Hobbes' conclusion is inescapable. Only if we find reality in the mind can we find room for free will.

Descartes (1596-1650) and Spinoza (1632-77) were mathematicians and carried the idea of mathematical necessity into metaphysics where it does not belong, just as Plato was inclined to do at times; but Plato was a far profounder thinker and had the audacity to be inconsistent when his philosophical insight demanded it. As mathematicians, Descartes and Spinoza maintained that, given the set-up of the world at any given moment, the outcome for all time was determined. Leibniz (1646-1716) too was a mathematician, but, like Plato, dared to be inconsistent, though at times he was inconsistent in the wrong place, motivated not by insight but by fear of the Church.

Spinoza equates freedom with understanding; he titles the Fifth Part of his *Ethics* "Concerning the Power of the Intellect or Human Freedom". For him the important consideration is not whether in behaving we are determined or free, but whether we are passive or active. For, for him, all that comes to pass is necessitated. But the more understanding we have of ourselves and of the world, the more of perfection we have in ourselves, and the more free we are in the only sense in which a finite being can be free. This is a noble conception

of freedom, and the only one compatible with strict causal determinism. Spinoza could not go beyond that, fettered as he was by his acquiescence in the sterility of Cartesian rationalism .

Spinoza, being an honest man, accepted without demur the consequences of the rationalist determinism he thought incontrovertible. Leibniz, who was by no means less intelligent or clear-headed than Spinoza, would have done the same. Somewhere he says, “To ask whether there is freedom in our will, is the same as asking whether there is will in our will. Free and voluntary mean the same thing.” (G. IV. 362.) And again, “Whatever acts, is free in so far as it acts.” (G. I. 331.) But Leibniz was not a heroic man; he was not prepared to face the ostracism and drudgery that were imposed on Spinoza in consequence of his beliefs. So Leibniz juggled with words to show that there can be predetermination without necessity. As Bertrand Russell puts it:

“Leibniz recognized ... that all psychical events have their causes, just as physical events have, and that prediction is as possible, theoretically, in the one case as in the other. To this he was committed by his whole philosophy, and especially by the pre-established harmony. He points out that the

future must be determined, since any proposition about it must be already true or false. ... And with this, if he had not been resolved to rescue free will, he might have been content. The whole doctrine of contingency might have been dropped with advantage. But that would have led to a Spinozistic necessity, and have contradicted Christian dogma.” (*The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 1900, Sect. 118.)

Leibniz resorts to the distinction between inclining and necessitating: this is mere word-jugglery, just like the distinction between necessity and contingency when taken out of the sphere of logic and is purported to have significance in the metaphysical sphere.

It is odd that Hume (1711-76), who was the first to shatter the idea of causation as a law inherent in nature, should yet be seen by causal determinists as a champion of their cause. For, ironically, while empiricists proudly announce themselves descendants of Hume, they choose to forget that he showed all our pretensions to knowledge to be nothing better than pious dreams. In *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section VIII, Of Liberty and Necessity, Part I, Hume argues that there is as much uniformity in

human character and human behaviour as is to be found in nature. He calls this necessity. Since people – among them philosophers – when observing regular succession in nature suppose that there is a force which necessitates that the ‘effect’ should follow the ‘cause’, by the same token, when we observe regularity in human behaviour, we should regard that as necessity. This is good as far as it goes, and though it sits uneasily with the rest of Hume’s philosophy, let us concede it to him. Where does it take us? Only to the point that all human activity is sufficiently ‘caused’, which does not conflict with the view that principles and ideals can be effective factors in determining human activity. By itself, Hume’s argument does not entail or support predetermination.

Determinism, interpreted in a sufficiently broad manner, as a corollary of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, would be incontrovertible. Every happening must be rationally justified. But this is not how determinism is commonly understood.

CAUSAL DETERMINISM

The classic statement of the postulate of causal determinism was formulated by Pierre Laplace (1749-1827) in his *Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*:

“We ought to regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its antecedent state and as the cause of the state that is to follow. An intelligence knowing all the forces acting in nature at a given instant, as well as the momentary positions of all things in the universe, would be able to comprehend in one single formula the motions of the largest bodies as well as the lightest atoms in the world, provided that its intellect were sufficiently powerful to subject all data to analysis; to it nothing would be uncertain, the future as well as the past would be present to its eyes. The perfection that the human mind has been able to give to astronomy affords but a feeble outline of such an intelligence” (as quoted in Carl Hoefer’s important article “Causal Determinism” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

The sanguine effusion of Laplace was in full tune with his age and time. This was the logical outcome of the Cartesian version of rationalism. In more recent times, mathematicians, physicists, and philosophers of science have made it more difficult to display such exuberant confidence. However, for the purposes of the present essay, it does not matter whether determinism be taken at this high pitch or

in any toned-down version.

Determinism rests on two postulates:

- 1. Everything that happens is subject to the ‘universal laws of nature’.**
- 2. Everything that happens is theoretically predictable, being the outcome of causes which were in turn caused by antecedent causes.**

Both these assumptions are pragmatically serviceable scientific hypotheses that can never be anything other than that. The notion of cause is no more than a useful fiction. You will never find a unique cause causing anything. There is always a complex state of affairs extracted from a more comprehensive state of affairs followed by another state of affairs that is itself embedded in a wider background. Laplace speaks of the state of the universe at a given instant. But the instant is again a fiction as Zeno knew and Einstein knew and as Quantum mechanics is making plain. Laplace’s intelligent being will never find a definable state of the universe at a given instant: the universe never is but is always becoming what it is not. Nature has habits and favours regularity but never replicates itself, never sings the same melody without some original modulation. Hence scientific laws of nature are always approximations and are all provisional.

THE COMPATILITY-INCOMPATIBILITY DEBATE

The Compatibility-Incompatibility controversy is fuelled by the acceptance, common to both parties, of causal determinism as an incontrovertible postulate of science. Once that is admitted, all the arguments are nothing but tautology on the one side and evasion on the other side. In a theoretically closed system, where every happening is causally determined by the antecedently obtaining set-up, Incompatibilism regiments and deploys the forces of heaven and earth to assert that what is determined cannot be undetermined, and Compatibilism has no resort but to seek specious verbal formulations and equations that seemingly do not contradict the ‘truth’ of causal determinism.

Antony Flew (*An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, 1971), following Leibniz, seeks to escape the conclusion that causal determinism entails inevitability by distinguishing between the necessity of the law of causation (if the cause obtains, the effect will necessarily obtain) on the one hand, and the contingency of the effect (there is no logical contradiction in affirming that the effect

could have been otherwise) on the other hand. This distinction does not serve Flew's purpose. The concepts of necessity and contingency are second-order concepts, pertaining to theoretical logic. On the ground, whenever the cause obtains, then, under causal determinism, the effect cannot but obtain: effect (a determinate effect) follows cause (a determinate cause) as surely as night follows day (though this itself is something contingent). We cannot evade the presumed inevitability of our actions by logic; we transcend it by grace of the fortunate circumstance that our action is never imprisoned in a closed system.

When Shelley's Prometheus (in *Prometheus Unbound*) cries out

"It doth repent me; words are quick and vain;
"Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine.
"I wish no living thing to suffer pain",

it is no consolation to him to reflect that the grief that blinded him for a while and made him utter the curse was logically contingent. The curse was uttered ineluctably. But had he controlled his grief for a while longer and remembered the sentiment "I wish no living thing to suffer pain", he would have withheld the curse. But in all of this we are still moving in the area of deliberation and choice, which, I maintain, is not the core of the free will.

Kant (1724-1804) is the greatest of Compatibilists. In a footnote to a passage in the Preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant writes:

“The union of causality as freedom with causality as rational mechanism, the former established by the moral law, the latter by the law of nature in the same subject, namely, man, is impossible, unless we conceive him with reference to the former as a being in himself, and with reference to the latter as a phenomenon — the former in pure consciousness, the latter in empirical consciousness. Otherwise reason contradicts itself” (tr. T. K. Abbott, p.16).

This proposes a pact of non-belligerence between empirical science and morality, a policy of live and let live. (The empiricists have never honoured the pact!) But unless we realize that causal determinism is not and can never be anything more than a working hypothesis that cannot claim absolute validity, then the reconciliation between causal determinism and freedom cannot be any deeper than Kant makes it. Only when we realize that all becoming is creative, is freedom firmly and securely established. All the arguments of Compatibilism and Incompatibilism

are then seen to be beside the point. (For detailed comments on Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* see Part Two below.)

CHOICE

Many of those who concern themselves with the philosophical problem of free will see the problem as revolving around the question whether it is true to say that, in a given situation, a person could do otherwise than she or he does. This, in my view, is not the crux of the free will problem. That question is a psychological – not a philosophical – one, and the yes or no to it depends on the level of motivation at which we choose to stop. Discussions are thus mainly, often exclusively, engrossed in the examination of the intricacies of the psychology of choice and deliberation. This befuddles the issue.

Choice and deliberation follow from the circumstance that we have the power to objectify our desires, inclinations, aims, and so on, and to constitute of ourselves an arbiter over and above the desires, inclinations, and aims. We are no longer passively moved by those motives but can bring one motive, ideal, or value, to work on the others. Still this capacity to deliberate and exercise choice is not the freedom that constitutes our true

worth as human beings.

Farah, my granddaughter (2 yrs 5 m.), is crying. She wants to go downstairs to play with the neighbours' children. "I want to play," she cries. Of course, except when sleeping or feeding, she does nothing all the time but play. When she takes up one of her toys or goes to her swing, she does something she wants to do, but we may regard that as a first-level desire. But now, crying "I want to play", she has the idea of a possibility that is not at the moment actual. This we may regard as a second-level desire. Here we have a higher plane of autonomy. Of course this is still a far cry from moral autonomy. But I think we must recognize that here we already have an ideal sphere that has a role in moulding action. I will not say that the idea affects or influences the act; it does not act from outside; it is not a separate thing; it, along with other factors, acts itself out in the act. I call that a plane or stage of autonomy.

One point that I have to make clear and insist on is that although we habitually think of the will as a faculty that can be distinguished from (or within) the totality of the person, we should never forget that this distinction is a theoretical fiction. (Hobbes was perfectly right when he identified the Will with "the Act (not the faculty,) of Willing", as quoted above.) We can and do distinguish the will

just as we distinguish desire, emotion, memory, etc. Such distinctions are the stuff of thought. But they are fictions. It is the whole person, the person as a whole, that acts, thinks, deliberates, decides, and so on. Wherever I speak of the will, we might replace the word ‘will’ with ‘mind’ or ‘soul’. Where such substitution makes no sense, there must be something wrong with the original statement.

Let it be said at once that, even within the scope of deliberation and choice, to say that the will is undetermined is not to say that the act of the will is uncaused. The act as an actual happening must be justified, must have ‘sufficiently reason’. To say that the will is undetermined is to say that the will (which here can be equated with the mind or soul), even when subjected to external pressures, acts in fulfilment of its own constitution. (To say ‘whatever happens must have a cause’ is unduly confusing, it is better to say ‘whatever happens must have a precedent’.)

Thus free will is not in any sense “the operation of an uncaused cause”, and it would only make for confusion to take that to be the meaning of spontaneity. A person, with all her or his aptitudes, motives, goals, ideals, is a natural product of preceding natural processes, including ‘spiritual’ influences which, coming from outside the person, are so far objective and natural.

We all know that it is no compliment for any person to be characterized as unpredictable. A person whose acts are unpredictable is either a shallow thing driven by every whim and every puff of circumstance, or is a vicious, wily, scheming rogue. An honest, virtuous person's acts are always consistent with her or his character and principles.

RESPONSIBILITY

Equally with the question of choice, I regard the discussion of responsibility as an intrusion into the metaphysical problem of free will. The discussion of responsibility is on one side a psychological question and on the other side a legal or politico-social question. In both these aspects it is of course a fit subject for philosophical investigation in a wider sense of the term philosophical; what I am denying is that it is of any relevance to the strictly metaphysical problem of the meaning of free will.

A person who, under compulsion, does a wrongful deed, may be legally exculpable, and yet may be held to be morally responsible, because she or he has weighed the consequences of doing and of not doing and has chosen to do, when she or he could have chosen to die, for instance, or endure

some heavy loss, rather than do the deed. But if someone physically much stronger than I am clasps my hand to a gun, points it, and presses my finger to the trigger, this would not be an act of mine any more than if I fell from a high building and in falling crushed and killed an unfortunate person that happened to be standing below. In both these cases, the event, as far as I am concerned, takes place on the physical plane, not on the plane of my subjective reality.

Edward Westermarck (*Ethical Relativity*, 1932, p.181) argues that determinism does not conflict with responsibility. He seeks to explain “the fallacy which is at the bottom of the notion that moral valuation is inconsistent with determinism.” He thinks that to hold that position is to confound determinism with fatalism. After asserting that “the logical outcome of radical fatalism is a denial of all moral imputability and a rejection of all moral judgment”, he goes on to say, “Not so with determinism. While fatalism presupposes the existence of a person who is constrained by an outward power, determinism regards the person himself as in every respect a product of causes. It does not assume any part of his will to have existed previous to his formation by the causes; his will cannot possibly be constrained by them because there is nothing to constrain, it is

made by them.” But what is this but to negate the personality of the person? If fatalism is “a denial of all moral imputability”, determinism is a denial of all personality, and what is left then to hold responsible? Approval or disapproval of an action is then reduced to one or both of two things: (1) an expression of our subjective pleasure or displeasure and (2) a measure for encouraging or deterring such actions — if that could still make sense under determinism.

RECAPITULATION

I maintain that the Determinism and Free Will ‘problem’, which many thinkers have declared intractable, is a pseudo-problem, engendered by raising a scientific hypothesis – which (1) is unverified and unverifiable, and (2) in any case has no relevance to philosophical inquiry – to the status of a first principle. This error is closely linked to the prevailing Empiricist outlook, which sees ‘reality’ in the phenomenal world and not in the mind.

The pseudo-problem is further complicated by the identification of freedom with choice. On top of that, the proper understanding of the metaphysical

problem of free will is hindered by the prevailing static conception of reality, which fails to recognize creativity as an ultimate principle. To me, creativity is the essence of free will.

The properly philosophical question relating to free will is simply this: What is free will? And it is answered not by any objective observation or experimentation; nor by any subjective analysis; but first and foremost by acknowledging the self-evident reality of spontaneous, purposive activity. The self-evident reality of freedom is the ground of – and reciprocally is grounded in – a metaphysical vision that sees all reality as creative, indeed sees ultimate reality as sheer creativity.

In what follows I develop this approach, first in commenting on Kant's second Critique, and then through comments on some papers by a number of contemporary philosophers.

PART TWO

KANT, *CRITIQUE OF PRACTIAL REASON*

(All quotations from T. K. Abbott's translation, 1996)

The whole controversy about free will (the modern, scientific, as opposed to the earlier theological version) should have been put to rest with Kant's first *Critique*. In the words of the Preface to the second *Critique*, transcendental freedom, freedom in the absolute sense, is required by speculative reason "in its use of the concept of causality in order to escape the antinomy into which it inevitably falls, when in the chain of cause and effect it tries to think the *unconditioned*" (p. 13).

In the first *Critique* Kant finds that reason can only see the phenomenal world as a world of insubstantial shadows, which reason conjectures must have noumenal support, which however we can never know. But within us, in the moral act, we find that noumenon real and full of life, and only there do we have true causality. That is the long

and the short of it.

Where Kant goes wrong is in trying to establish the reality of freedom apodeictically. True, he only purports to establish the necessity of the concept of freedom. But then, on his own principles – and as his critics were not slow to show – that does not prove the existence of freedom. There can be no proof of that, for freedom is not the kind of thing that can ‘exist’. (I wanted to write ‘exist objectively’, but that would have clashed with Kant’s own usage where ‘objective’ signifies rational, just as ‘practical’ with him signifies moral.) So Kant’s winged words about ‘the moral sense within’ sway the minds of more people than are persuaded by his theoretical arguments for the necessity of the concept.

Kant tortures himself and his readers by soaring into the thin air of second-order and third-order concepts in the hope of proving the actuality of moral freedom. He should have spared himself the trouble by acknowledging that however much we refine and sophisticate our theory, at some point we have to stop and say with Socrates, It is by Beauty that all beautiful things are beautiful. The idea of freedom is a reality; it has no actuality (existence) that can be discovered by any means, and the only ‘proof’ of its reality is its self-evidence. Any other ‘proof’ can be a fine piece of intellectual

artistry, but can always be ‘proved’ to be flawed.

In the same way the ideas of God (as ultimate reality) and Immortality (understood as eternity of the soul) are realities that give meaning to life, yet theoretically, as Kant himself admits, they remain mere ‘possibilities’. Nothing can show them as actualities. The idea of freedom does not differ essentially from these. Kant asserts that there is a difference because he chooses to see the actualization of the moral law in the practical sphere as proof of the actuality of moral freedom. This only makes for confusion.

To understand Kant you have to think in terms of his concepts. That is, you have to put aside all you have learned and all you have thought for yourself, don Kant’s mind, and think with that mind. Then you will see that everything must be just as Kant says it is. This of course is true in the case of all original thinkers, but as Kant has created a whole new conceptual world, it is more evident in his case.

The one plausible formal solution in modern times to the problem of free will (if it is to be regarded as a problem) is found in Kant’s distinction between the ‘subject’ as phenomenon (strictly, a contradiction in terms) and the subject as noumenon. The phenomenal ‘subject’ is (as observed objectively from outside) part of nature

and acts under natural law. The noumenal subject is autonomous and free. This could have been seen as a passable answer to the problem. All our acts have sufficient reason; nothing we do contradicts natural law; on the other hand, all acts done by us as persons are autonomous, spontaneous, and free. But Kant accepted without question the scientific presuppositions of his time, and hence could not remove altogether the apparent contradiction between phenomenal determinism and noumenal freedom. In this, Kant is in the same position as Spinoza whose great insight into the reality of moral autonomy was unduly limited by his unquestioning acceptance of causal determinism.

Kant is the opposite pole to Plato. Plato lets his philosophical insights clothe themselves in whatever conceptual garb they chance to find handy. A sympathetic reader can always easily penetrate to his meaning, and critics can always feast on his apparent contradictions. Kant's fondness for intricate, majestic theoretical structures obscures his great insights, and while admirers revel (justly) in the 'perfect' consistence of his towering architectonics (a favourite word with him), unfriendly critics can always find in the detailed concepts and minute distinctions a plethora of faults and endless contradictions, for nothing determinate can be free of imperfection.

Kant formulates Problem I in the Analytic thus: “Supposing that the mere legislative form of maxims is alone the sufficient determining principle of a will, to find the nature of the will which can be determined by it alone” (p.43). He finds that “such a will must be conceived as quite independent on the natural law of phenomena in their mutual relation, namely, the law of causality; such independence is called *freedom* in the strictest, that is in the transcendental sense; consequently, a will which can have its law in nothing but the mere legislative form of the maxim is a free will” (p. 43). A fine exercise of reasoning. But if someone is to understand what it is to suppose the legislative form of maxims to be the determining principle of a will, that someone must have experienced the reality of free will. If, with Socrates, we begin with the self-evidence of the reality, we need no proof; if we rely on proof, anyone who does not acknowledge the reality can justly accuse us of playing tricks with words. (Anyone acquainted with contemporary philosophy can name a score of professional philosophers who will readily sign their names to that accusation.)

Kant’s philosophy of the Categorical Imperative gives creative expression to the reality of the moral experience. It builds a theoretical structure to articulate the reality. That is all any

theory ever does: no theory exhausts the reality it represents; no theory is ever definitive; all reality is inexhaustible. (For a defence of these bald and bold utterances, see my *Let Us Philosophize*, passim, “Philosophy as Prophecy”, etc.) The theoretical edifices that can be erected to represent any given reality are without limit — just as poetic images of love are without limit; and if poets in our day no longer speak of love, it is not because the subject has been exhausted, but because there is so little of love in our modern life.

After telling us that what gives actions moral worth is “*that the moral law should directly determine the will*”, Kant tells us that “as to the question how a law can be directly and of itself a determining principle of the will (which is the essence of morality), this is, for human reason, an insoluble problem and identical with the question: how a free will is possible” (pp. 92-93). This is the deontological riddle that Kant has left as a legacy to philosophical controversy, to the endless delight of professional philosophers. Kant’s addiction to ‘pure’ concepts lies behind the riddle. For him all immediacy smacks of the empirical. He creates concepts and distinctions and decides that these form the whole content of pure reason. He does not see that this alienates from reason the realities that those concepts and distinctions were created to

represent. Thus while maintaining that “the objective reality of the moral law cannot be proved by any deduction ... [nor] proved *a posteriori* by experience, and yet it is firmly established of itself” (pp. 64-65), he still denies that we have any intuition of the moral law, but only a concept of the form of the law.

Kant rightly insists that autonomy as such does not preclude determinism. He insists that “it does not matter whether the principles which necessarily determine causality by a physical law reside *within* the subject or *without* him, or in the former case whether these principles are instinctive or are conceived by reason, if ... these determining ideas have the ground of their existence in time and in the *antecedent state*, and this again in an antecedent &c.” (p. 118). He rightly insists that moral freedom transcends causal determinism, but as he still upholds the validity of causal determinism for phenomena he has to rest content with an unresolved contradiction between the phenomenal and the noumenal orders. I maintain that this contradiction can only be overcome by the principle of creativity as an ultimate dimension of reality.

For Kant there is no speculative answer to the apparent contradiction of physical causality and freedom of the will. There is only a practical

answer which Kant explicitly describes as faith. And of Kant's three Postulates of Practical Reason – the existence of God, freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul – it is only the freedom of the will of which we have immediate awareness and which can therefore claim the self-evidence of an idea engendered by the mind. Had Kant chosen to be more consistent with his own critical philosophy and maintain that none of these ideas can be admitted to give us any knowledge of any existents external to our minds, he would have found the ideas of God (as ideal perfection) and the soul (as supra-temporal reality) possessed of the same self-evidence as intelligible realities, needing no proof and capable of no proof.

It hardly needs saying that a free will is not capricious. Kant says that a free will is determined by the form of the law. We can say that a free will is determined by a principle or an ideal. The principle of sufficient reason is satisfied, and that is causal determinism if you will. Wherein then does the freedom of a free will consist? First, in autonomy: that is compatible with determinism: that is Spinoza's freedom. More important, free will is creative spontaneity, which shows that such determinism, if we have to use the word, demands the sufficiency of the grounds of the act, but does not dictate the outcome. Shakespeare scribbling a

sonnet — every word, every syllable, is sufficiently grounded and literary critics and scholars can analytically reduce the sonnet to the motives, beliefs, prejudices, influences, desires, and what not, that went to its making. But Laplace’s all-knowing intelligent being could not foretell

**“But flowers distill’d, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show, their substance still lives sweet.” (Sonnet V.)**

PART THREE

[The six papers discussed in this Part all appear in The Determinism and Freedom Philosophy Website, edited by Ted Honderich, to which I am much indebted. I think these six papers are representative of present-day approaches to the question of free will within contemporary professional philosophy.]

**PETER VAN INWAGEN:
“THE MYSTERY OF METAPHYSICAL
FREEDOM”**

Peter van Inwagen speaks of freedom (in one sense) as freedom from constraint. Of course there is no such thing as absolute freedom; even theistic theologians agree that there are things which God cannot do. Constraint simply limits the scope of theoretically possible choice. The instances given by Inwagen – paralysis, neurosis, poverty – are

limiting but do not rule out Stoic freedom. Even the agoraphobic can choose either to fight her or his phobia or to reconcile herself or himself to it and order her or his life accordingly. The constraint conditions the behaviour but does not determine it.

Inwagen holds that “there is a concept of freedom that is not a merely negative concept, and this concept is a very important one.” Further on Professor Inwagen says, “Metaphysical freedom ... is simply what is expressed by ‘can’.” After clearing some linguistic ambiguities about the word ‘can’, Inwagen goes on to consider ‘false philosophical theories’ related to uses of the word. He writes, “An example of such a theory would be: ‘I can do X’ means ‘There exists no impediment, obstacle, or barrier to my doing X; nothing prevents my doing X’.” I would not call this a theory but a definition, which may be of much or of little use, but which cannot be said to be either true or false. It is a definition that sidesteps the question of determinism and compatibility and incompatibility, and Professor Inwagen could have spared himself the trouble of trying to ‘refute’ the ‘theory’ .

Inwagen then turns “to the question of the compatibility of determinism and metaphysical freedom.” He writes,

“I shall present an argument for the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with metaphysical freedom. Since, as we have seen, determinism and metaphysical freedom are compatible if metaphysical freedom (the concept expressed by ‘I can do X’) is a merely negative concept, this argument will in effect be an argument for the conclusion that metaphysical freedom is not a merely negative concept.”

Since Inwagen began by distinguishing ‘metaphysical freedom’ from ‘freedom from constraint’, what need do we have to argue that ‘metaphysical freedom’ is other than ‘a merely negative freedom’, which amounts to saying that it is other than ‘freedom from constraint’? Let us next look at the argument “for the conclusion that determinism is incompatible with metaphysical freedom”.

We are told that “unless we are *bona fide* miracle workers, we can make only such additions to the actual past as conform to the laws of nature. But the only additions to the actual past that conform to a deterministic set of laws are the additions that are actually made ...” I can’t read into this anything more than the platitude: if determinism is true then determinism is true, and

yet Inwagen considers this argument as having “great persuasive power”, though he does not find it conclusive. Those philosophers who regard it as evident that we are free and have yet accepted an argument for the incompatibility of determinism and metaphysical freedom, “have denied that the laws of nature and the past together determine a unique future.”

Those philosophers, among whom Inwagen counts himself, face, as he tells us, a difficult problem. He questions whether “postulating or asserting that the laws of nature are indeterministic provide[s] any comfort to those who would like to believe in metaphysical freedom”. Why not? Inwagen articulates: “If the laws are indeterministic, then more than one future is indeed consistent with those laws and the actual past and present — but how can anyone have any choice about which of these futures becomes actual? Isn’t it just a matter of chance which becomes actual?” Here in these few lines we have, I think, three deadly errors, two of which I will simply point to, since they receive adequate treatment elsewhere in this essay, but the third, crystallizing one of the most serious faults of contemporary philosophy, deserves to be highlighted. The first error is the assumption that

an undetermined act flouts the principle of sufficient reason; it is wrong to equate freedom with chance, which is a negative concept. The second error lurks in the word ‘choice’; it is wrong to equate the concept of freedom with that of choice.

Now the third to Olympian Zeus the Saviour, as Plato would say: we are told that if the laws are indeterministic, then more than one future is possible, and then the problem turns around “which of these futures becomes actual”. As in so much of modern philosophy, we create a fiction and then mistake it for an actuality. The idea of possibility is a fiction, a very useful and fruitful fiction, but it is not the name of any given actuality. An engineer mooting which of two designs to adopt for his commission is not considering possibilities but formed projects, and here we do have scope for choice. The engineer’s projects are first order ideas; the logician’s presumption that the engineer could have chosen either project is a second order idea, a fiction without actuality. The possible worlds of Leibniz were a figment of his imagination which God never had before his mind. (See further below my comments on ‘possible worlds’ in the examination of Taylor’s and Dennett’s paper.) Mozart, composing a movement, would not weigh

possibilities; only when the inspiration flagged would he waver between alternatives, and then the alternatives are not abstract possibilities but actual tunes in his inner ear. In writing a philosophical essay, only at the weakest points of your argument do you stop and weigh alternatives; all the best parts of the work ‘write themselves’, flowing in creative spontaneity from your mind.

Inwagen sets himself the task of “discovering whether either of the two arguments [for the incompatibility and for the compatibility of freedom with determinism] is defective, and (if so) of locating the defect or defects.” But encumbering himself with the tools of ‘possibility’ and ‘choice’ and accepting the ‘scientific’ presupposition that all natures must be subject to ‘laws of nature’, the task is, in the strictest sense, impossible of accomplishment. His experiment with the idea of “a world inhabited only by immaterial intelligences” does not help. “The dilemma”, he says, “arises from the concept of metaphysical freedom itself, and its conclusion is that metaphysical freedom is a contradictory concept.”

But he cannot rest in this conclusion, for “none of us really believes this”. Where does that leave us? That reason tells us our free will is an

illusion yet our feelings (would that ‘feelings’ were given their true name, namely, the self-evident immediacy of reality!) tell us it is a reality? In fact, Professor Inwagen ends his essay by candidly confessing: “I am certain that I cannot dispel the mystery, and I am certain that no one else has in fact done so.” To my mind this is a necessary consequence of our failure to acknowledge the radical distinction between scientific thinking and philosophical thinking. Even Kant, who tentatively groped in that direction, did not go the whole way; only Socrates had the answer which we neglect to stand to, to our own detriment.

Had Kant had the stamina to follow his ‘Copernican revolution’ through, he would have seen that science, making use of the ‘concepts of the understanding’ shapes the shadows of the phenomenal world into intelligible formations while poets and mystics and disillusioned philosophers have insight into our inner reality, the only reality accessible to human intelligence.

**THOMAS NAGEL:
“FREEDOM AND THE VIEW FROM
NOWHERE”**

Nagel’s distinction between the subjective and the objective (as defined by him) cannot be fundamental. He admits that “the distinction between more subjective and more objective views is really a matter of degree.” It is really a question of wider or narrower fields of experience. This is other than the distinction between the phenomenal domain and the domain of subjective reality which I think is philosophically all-important. It is because modern philosophers refuse to, or stop short of, acknowledging that the realm of intelligible ideas is the realm of reality in contradistinction to the realm of transient existence that they find reality invariably slipping through their fingers every time they think they are on the point of getting hold of it. Even staunch believers in subjectivity, such as Nagel, think that

if they cannot subjugate it to the terms of objectivity, then its reality is not ascertained.

Actions viewed “from an objective or external standpoint” are seen “as part of the order of nature”. Professor Nagel seems to see a problem in this. But if all action, all becoming, has sufficient reason, then, naturally, viewed from outside, the connectedness of its moments can only be seen under the form of causation. This is not a problem with freedom, but with us: we want to see spontaneous activity from outside and yet see it as it is inside, we make it into an object and demand that it display its subjectivity!

Nagel considers the problem of freedom under the two aspects of autonomy and responsibility, and under both aspects finds it problematic. “We are apparently condemned to want something impossible.” I will comment only on his treatment of autonomy, for what we have to say here applies to the problem in its totality. How does the problem arise? “In acting we occupy the internal perspective ... But when we ... consider our own actions and those of others simply as part of the course of events ... it begins to look as though we never really contribute anything.” Unless we free ourselves from the empirical presumption that only the objective is real and

realize that it is the subjective that is the whole of reality, the problem will remain with us.

More to the point, who are the ‘we’ who (seemingly) ‘never really contribute’? Not only does it seem possible “that many of the alternatives that appear to lie open when viewed from an internal perspective would seem closed” but

“even if some of them are left open, given a complete specification of the condition of the agent and the circumstances of action, it is not clear how this would leave anything further for the agent to contribute to the outcome — anything that he could contribute as source, rather than merely as the scene of the outcome — the person whose act it is. If they are left open given everything about him, what does he have to do with the result?”

I have quoted this passage at some length because it affords an exemplary illustration of the quandaries that the analytical habit of mind creates for us. We begin by slicing ‘the agent’ off ‘the complete specification of the condition of the agent’, separating ‘the source’ from ‘the scene of the outcome’, isolating from the act ‘the person whose act it is’. We forget that only the whole is real: to think theoretically we are obliged to create

distinctions within the whole, but when we forget that these distinctions are fictions, we fall into a maze of contradictions. The person is his circumstances, is his act, is the outcome, and ‘contributes’ to the outcome by letting the circumstances creatively unfold – I will not say ‘in her or his’, because it is rather she or he that unfolds – her or his inner reality through the circumstances.

Nagel finds Kant’s “idea of the noumenal self which is outside time and causality” unintelligible. Regrettably it is unintelligible to the modern mind conditioned by the scientific outlook to equate what is real with what is objective. The noumenal self (if you choose to use that label) is a mystery, as all ultimate reality is a mystery, in the sense that it cannot be explained in terms of anything other than itself; its self-evidence is its reality and has to be accepted as such. This is the inner reality Heraclitus looked into and found unfathomable.

Nagel is driven to seek “a kind of reconciliation between the objective standpoint and the inner perspective of agency”, but he has to admit that this “does not meet the central problem of free will”. In my view, the reconciliation he proposes jettisons the metaphysical problem in an attempt to find comfort in psychological orientation.

Nagel speaks of “the objective self”. To me this is, on the metaphysical plane, a contradiction in terms. To objectify the self is to negate its reality. In his deservedly famous Bat essay, Nagel fights against the abolition of the subjective, but it remains for him an enigma, because he stops short of daring to affirm that it is the only reality we know. It is only when we audaciously affirm with Plato that the so-called ‘reality’ of the empirical Giants is a mere shadow, and that the only reality is the reality we know with immediacy in our own minds, that the enigma ceases to be enigmatic.

P. F. STRAWSON: “FREEDOM AND RESENTMENT”

P. F. Strawson, in a lecture which “made a change in thinking” (Ted Honderich), stating that he belongs to “the party of those who do not know what the thesis of determinism is”, concentrating on the question of responsibility, finding those who think responsibility compatible and those who think it incompatible with determinism at loggerheads, proposes to “move towards reconciliation”. He does this by drawing attention to attitudes and reactions which we feel to be important and which may well be socially important. This is very good as far as it goes, but, to my mind, is all beside the point where the metaphysical problem of free will is concerned.

Strawson considers the question: “What effect would, or should, the acceptance of the truth of a general thesis of determinism have upon these reactive attitudes?” The conclusion he arrives at is that “our natural human commitment to ordinary inter-personal attitudes ... is part of the general

framework of human life”. So we had better forget about compatibility and incompatibility. I too happen to campaign for that proposal, but with a difference. I begin from the reality of free will, and then pose the metaphysical question: What are we to understand by ‘free will’? But then, as we learn from Socrates, for all questions of the form ‘What is X?’, the final philosophical answer is ‘X is X’. The end of all philosophical inquiry is to behold the reality in its own light.

GALEN STRAWSON: “FREE WILL”

Galen Strawson, in common with many other contemporary thinkers, makes the error of equating absence of causal determinism with chance. “Their [the libertarians’] great difficulty is to explain why the falsity of determinism is any better than determinism ... For suppose that not every event is determined, and that some events occur randomly, or as a matter of chance. How can this help with free will?” I have no need to repeat here what I have already said in dealing with this point.

But the position with which Professor Strawson is apparently in sympathy is that of the “less sanguine” incompatibilists who “conclude that we are not genuinely free agents or genuinely morally responsible, whether determinism is true or false. ... When one acts, one acts in the way one does because of the way one is. So to be truly morally responsible for one’s actions, one would have to be truly responsible for the way one is: one

would have to be *causa sui* ... But nothing can be *causa sui* – nothing can be the ultimate cause of itself in any respect.”

Here I have three points to make, which I will put briefly because I have dealt with them sufficiently elsewhere. Firstly, to confound the problem of freedom with the problem of responsibility is to obliterate the metaphysical character of the problem. Secondly, I see no problem with the fact that I act the way I do because of the way I am; that, for me, is freedom: to act my character, to realize myself in action. Thirdly, to say that “nothing can be the ultimate cause of itself” is either simply false or a trite logical trick: ultimate reality – and all reality in so far as it has the character of reality – is its own ground and source; else there would be no being at all; but if we insist on intruding the fiction of cause where it has no right to be, then we fall into endless contradictions, as is clearly shown when Strawson expands his argument in section 3, under the rubric “Pessimism”.

Thus Strawson says that the “pessimists or no-freedom theorists”, among whom he obviously counts himself – apparently in opposition to his father’s ‘optimist conclusion’ –, “believe that free will, of the sort that is necessary for genuine moral responsibility, is provably impossible.”

I cannot understand why the concept of ‘moral agent’ should be tied to that of (moral) responsibility. I am a moral agent (or person, the term I prefer) when I act in fulfilment of ideals and values in the intelligible realm which constitutes my true being as a human.

If Strawson and others regard ‘self-origination’, as they derogatorily term it, as the downfall of free will, I see creativity as the very reality of free will. We do create ourselves in every spontaneous act. [It seems that the advocates of ‘origination’ have ensured the downfall of their doctrine when they made the ‘act of origination’ into a thing other than the spontaneous act itself. Like all theoretical fragmentations, it could not escape being riddled with contradictions. I am not defending any such approach or affiliating myself with it, and I have no use for the term ‘origination’ as intended in Strawson’s argument. What I wish to say is that advocates of origination have a point, but go the wrong way about vindicating it.]

Strawson argues at length that even if I try to change the way I am, I am determined in that endeavour by elements in the way I am. Granted: I am not God. I know that, and I am happy the way I am. The whole argument, in my view, boils down to this: there is an impossible sense of free will which we can prove to be impossible. Is this serious

philosophy?

Galen Strawson, like Ted Honderich, seems to reduce responsibility to a subjective feeling, yet his language is confusing. “One’s radical responsibility seems to stem simply from the fact that one is fully conscious of one’s situation, and knows that one can choose, and believes that one action is morally better than the other.” Responsibility stems from the awareness? What responsibility? One can choose? Isn’t that just what the question is about? One believes that one action is morally better? I believe that if you can say that, then you have already done away with the problem. To believe that one action is morally better is to bring into action (pardon the pun; it’s harmless) a transcendent reality, a new plane of being, the spiritual plane: and that is moral freedom.

Galen Strawson refuses to commit himself philosophically. His explicit purpose is “to explain why the debate is likely to continue for as long as human beings can think.” But I think I have not done him wrong in my comments since he finds (1) powerful logical and metaphysical reasons on the side of denying free will, and (2) powerful psychological reasons on the side of belief in free will. The second point he apparently owes to P. F. Strawson’s attitudinal thesis. In his summation of

‘challenges to pessimism’ in sect. 6 it is quite obvious where his heart and mind lie.

**CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR AND DANIEL
DENNETT:
“WHO’S AFRAID OF DETERMINISM?
RETHINKING CAUSES AND POSSIBILITIES”**

Can Analytical Philosophy contribute to the ‘solution of the problem of Free Will? Professors Christopher Taylor and Daniel Dennett put their hands to it in “Who’s Afraid of Determinism? Rethinking Causes and Possibilities”. (*The Oxford Companion of Free Will*, edited by Professor Robert Kane. The paper is also accessible on Ted Hoderich’s Determinism and Freedom Philosophy Website, which I have acknowledge as my source.) The explicit purpose of the authors is to argue that the fear that determinism jeopardizes free will is unjustified; their strategy is to show that even with determinism there is no dearth of possibilities.

Unfortunately, the possibilities turn out to be possibilities in ‘other worlds’ that cannot be actualized in our world. I do not think they succeed in advancing the discussion. In commenting on the paper at some length my purpose is not so much to

examine its thesis as to show that the methods of Analytical Philosophy can make no significant contribution to philosophical thinking. I arrange my comments under the headings of the original paper to facilitate reference.

[Untitled introductory section]

Taylor and Dennett write, “Consider the case where I miss a very short putt and kick myself because I could have holed it.” They deploy all the state-of-the-art weaponry of Analytical Philosophy to carry out an analysis of “I could have holed it”. I maintain that this can shed no light on the philosophical problem of free will. Such analyses can be very interesting language games or logical games, but in studying *what was not*, the authors are neither examining an empirical actuality nor looking into a meaningful idea: the analyses develop fanciful (the word is used in a neutral sense) scenarios that have no relation to what was or what is. But when I translate “I could have done it” into “Next time I have to be more careful”, this is a positive idea that will (provided I keep the resolve in mind) enter into the making of my next attempt, whatever the result. (The psychology of “I could have done it” differs from that of “I could have done otherwise” where alternative choices are

involved, but what I say of the futility of theoretical analysis holds in any case.)

“PSSIBLE WORLDS”

Professors Taylor and Dennett proceed to untangle the complexities underlying our concepts of causation and possibility. To do so, it seems, we have to ... “pretend that space is Euclidean” ... “assume a Democritean view” ... “pretend that ... one can judge” whether a particular world “accords with natural law” — while confessedly “we do not yet know all the laws of nature” ... and then, with the magic of symbols and quantifiers and counterfactuals and possible worlds, out of these compounded pretensions and assumptions and confessed lack of knowledge, we are expected to reach conclusions that have significance for our world. I am a naïve idiot: I prefer to stick to the realities that people my mind, which give me an intelligible universe. But empiricism will sooner admit the existence (indeed the actual existence!) of Possible Worlds and Counterfactuals than acknowledge the simple reality of the mind.

Taylor and Dennett translate “Austin could have holed the putt” into the language of symbolic

logic, which I need not reproduce, but which I will re-translate thus: There is a (formally) possible world in which ‘Austin holes the putt’ is true. Does this take us any farther than saying that we can fantasize Austin holing the putt? Logical notation no doubt has very useful applications. But I deny it can have any value for philosophy.

“COUNTERFACTUALS”

In my opinion, this section clearly shows that Taylor and Dennett are not in the least concerned with determinism or with such a mundane thing as freedom. They are concerned, in common with all Analytical Philosophers, with the old eristic problem, How can negative statements have meaning?, or, to give it a new look, How can conditional or hypothetical statements have meaning? — a problem which Plato long ago settled satisfactorily in the *Sophist*. Call me stupid, but to my mind, all the symbolic trickery displayed in this section is nothing but that, vacuous trickery with symbols that does not add an iota to what can be said in good plain English. Its sole purpose is to get around such dirty words as ‘not’ or ‘could’ or ‘if’ by using sterilized symbols and roundabout

formulations.

“CAUSATION “

Taylor and Dennett write, “Fundamental as it appears, the language of causation has stirred up interminable debate”. They “think a more realistic goal is simply to develop a formal analogue (or analogues) that helps us think more clearly about the world.” A formal analogue (or analogues) can help us handle the thoughts we have about the world less awkwardly. This is just what the symbols of arithmetic do so wonderfully. But such formal analogues will never give us any new thoughts or disclose anything that is not already in the thoughts with which we begin. What we need do to end the interminable debate about causation is to acknowledge that it is a useful fiction and no more.

Marginally, may I ask, what do we gain by speaking of “possible worlds” instead of simply saying: ‘logically or conceivably the moon, say, may escape from the gravitational pull of the earth’? Our astrophysicists can come up with a hundred theoretical scenarios in which that that happens without having to posit the existence of

non-existent impossible possible worlds — and, believe me, this last phrase is not a parody! Even miracles are thinkable; we need for them no ‘possible worlds’ other than the worlds of our fantasy. The “possible worlds’ of our new-fangled ‘metaphysicians’ is of the stuff of media stunts.

“DETERMINISM AND POSSIBILITY (THESES 1)”

So finally, it would appear, our authors are moving on to the brunt. “Now that we have some formal machinery in place, we can reconsider the spuriously ‘obvious’ fear that determinism reduces our possibilities.” How is the obvious fear shown to be spurious? We go back to ‘Austin holes the putt’. In a world identical to our world, what holds in our world holds. But that’s too narrow a choice. We may admit into our possible worlds “worlds that differ in a few imperceptibly microscopic ways” from our actual world, and that can make all the difference. Being an incorrigible idiot, I will still ask: What is that to me? If determinism is true in this petty world of ours, what do I care if in one of Leibniz’ infinite possible worlds I could have chosen to beat Bill Gates at his game instead of

writing philosophy? If determinism is true in this one world we know, then the obvious fears for our freedom would not be spurious, and juggling with symbols and formal analogues can befog the issue but cannot do away with it. (I am not here taking part in Taylor's and Dennett's controversy with John Austin.)

So when Taylor and Dennett say, "From this it follows that the truth or falsity of determinism should not affect our belief that certain unrealized events were nevertheless 'possible' in an important everyday sense of the word", I can only say that that 'important everyday sense' is none other than the purely logical sense of possible, where possible means not formally self-contradictory. Did anybody ever deny that? You cannot deny a definition, can you? But does that have any relevance to the 'obvious fear' that in a given strongly deterministic world – and a particular given world is what matters to us here and now – nothing is possible but what obtains? (To preclude misunderstanding, I reject that fear, but on other grounds, not by fantasizing possibilities.)

I think Taylor and Dennett argue against themselves in the "chess-playing computer programs" scenario they offer. I have to quote this passage at some length.

“Computers are marvels of determinism. Even their so-called random number generators only execute pseudo-random functions ... That means that computer programs that avail themselves of randomness at various ‘choice’ points will nevertheless spin out exactly the same sequence of states if run over and over again from a cold start. Suppose ... you install two different chess-playing programs ... and yoke them together with a little supervisory program ... if either chess program consults the random number generator during its calculations ... then in the following game the state of the random number generator will have changed ... and a variant game will blossom ... Nevertheless, if you turned off the computer, and then restarted it running the same program, exactly the same variegated series of games would spin out.”

Doesn’t this amount simply to saying that determinism is deterministic after all? Even with the smuggling in of the mischievous ‘if’ half-way through the story, we only have a different but equally deterministic world.

The development of the story in the succeeding paragraphs does not make any significant change. Reverting to the story of the missed putt, the authors say, “Looking at precisely the same case, again and again, is utterly uninformative, but looking at similar cases is in fact diagnostic.” Very good advice, but this is not philosophy but pedagogy. Don’t go on grumbling “I could have, I could have” but rather say ‘I should have prepared differently’ or better still ‘In future I should prepare differently’. The authors tell us that if in “looking at similar cases” we interpret the similarity too liberally “we would be committing an error alluded to earlier, making X [the set of possible worlds] too large.” In the simple language of us simpletons, that would be a lot of day-dreaming. But we have already been told that by adopting too narrow a choice we would be stuck with our actual uninteresting world. “It is only if we ‘wiggle the events’ (as David Lewis has said), looking not at ‘conditions as they precisely were’ but at neighbouring worlds, that we achieve any understanding at all.” Again I say, good advice for a golfer wanting to improve his record. But when the authors go on to say, “The burden rests with incompatibilists to explain why ‘real’ possibility demands a narrow choice of X – or why we should be interested in such a concept of possibility,

regardless of its ‘reality’”, I must say this is either confused thinking or sheer sophistry. A narrow choice of X is demanded because here we are not playing logical games but are practically concerned with the practical problem of living in a world very narrowly chosen for us. Unless Taylor and Dennett and Lewis and the rest find the means to transport us to their possible worlds, the only possibilities we are interested in are the possibilities permitted in this one actual world of ours.

When in the concluding paragraph of this section the authors say that “introducing indeterminism adds little in the way of worthwhile possibilities, opportunities, or competences to a universe”, they are obviously equating indeterminism with chance or the kind of determined computer randomness they alluded to earlier. If by indeterminism we only mean to deny that strong determinism holds, then it is pointless to argue for or against this purely negative notion before we give it some coherent content.

“SOME RELATED FEARS “

I will only remark that ‘possibility’ in this section seems to be equated with the good old Aristotelean

‘potentiality’, anything that, given the normal run of things, will happen. Taylor and Dennett seem to argue against Honderich that, if I am pre-determined to be fortunate, then I have no cause to complain. But I do; I want my fortune to be my own doing. Then the authors say, “In general, there is no paradox in the observation that certain phenomena are determined to be changeable, chaotic, and unpredictable, an obvious and important fact that philosophers have curiously ignored.” Who said the ‘fact’ was ignored? Isn’t this the idea of God creating a pre-determined world with room for free will and miracles? And isn’t this to eat one’s cake and have it? But I am eager to move on to the next section where the authors promise to show that “creativity, the ability to author something of ‘originative value’ is similarly independent of determinism.” I am eager, because I am an advocate of creativity, but I go there by a completely different route.

“DETERMINISM AND CAUSATION (THESIS 2)”

Taylor and Dennett suspect that the fear “that determinism would eliminate some worthwhile type

of causation from the universe ... stems from the conflation of causal necessity with causal sufficiency". They then go on to explain what they understand by determinism in contradistinction to causation, an understanding which, I suspect, not many share with them, not out of failure to understand, but because they chose to use the terms differently, which is their incontestable right as long as they make clear in what sense they are using the terms.

The authors state that (omitting the symbols) "according to determinism, the precise condition of the universe one second after the big bang ... causally sufficed to produce the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963." Then we are told that that precise condition of the universe, though sufficient, is hardly necessary, for "Kennedy might well have been assassinated anyway, even if some different conditions had obtained back during the universe's birth." Again the question is not whether in a fantasized possible world Kennedy might or might not have been killed, but whether in this actual world of ours Laplace's contention that at one second after the big bang Kennedy's assassination was predictable is true or not. (Pardon the anachronism.) To say that in a slightly different world a different outcome would have obtained is to evade the issue. We know that

Shakespeare's Cleopatra and Shaw's Cleopatra fared differently because they inhabited different worlds, but that has no relevance to the question whether the fate of the flesh-and-blood Cleopatra that lived in Egypt in the first century BC was predetermined or not.

“In fact, determinism is perfectly compatible with the notion that some events have no cause at all.” Beautiful! And these are the people who want to teach us the virtues of clear thinking! What instance do they give of an event that has “no cause at all”? The statement “The devaluation of the rupiah caused the Dow Jones average to fall.” The economist or the economic correspondent of the network that makes that announcement would readily confess it to be a loose, inaccurate statement, and that what caused the Dow Jones average to fall was not one factor but a complex combination of factors. Again, it is one thing to admonish us to be more careful with our attribution of causes and quite another thing to draw metaphysical conclusions from our (not their!) careless habits of speech.

Then we are told about the man “falling down an elevator shaft” and about worlds in which he survives. What great consolation for the poor man's widow! My two-year-old granddaughter plays at cooking her own lunch, takes a helping on

her toy plate, ‘eats’ with her toy spoon and toy fork, but when she feels hungry she goes to Mom to ask for food. She distinguishes very clearly between the world of fantasy and the actual world. Would that our present-day philosophers could do that!

“In closing, let us return to the human desire pinpointed by Kane ... the desire to be able to take full credit as the creators and causes of change in the world. ... The thirst for originality and causal relevance is not to be quenched by abstruse quantum events: all that we require is the knowledge that without our presence, the universe would have turned out significantly different.”

That says nothing about determinism and owes nothing to all the talk about possible worlds. In fact this position agrees with that of those philosophers who hold either that determinism is true or that it may be true but that in any case what matters to us is that we have this internal feeling of being free. I sympathize with that but I go further: I maintain that determinism is a working scientific hypothesis that has no place in metaphysics; that we have autonomy in a significant sense, and that we have creativity in a significant sense.

The most generous interpretation I can put on Professors Taylor’s and Dennett’s treatment of the

question is that they are so engrossed in their formally possible worlds that they easily confuse them with this insignificant actual world of ours.

**TED HONDERICH:
“DETERMINISM AS TRUE, COMPATIBILISM
AND INCOMPATIBILISM AS BOTH FALSE,
AND THE REAL PROBLEM”**

Ted Honderich begins by defining ‘event’ and ‘what is required for an event to be an explanation’. He lays down the protocol for the language he intends to use. The conclusions he will draw will be true in/for that language, that is, true within the universe of discourse created by that language. That is so, I maintain, for all philosophy and for all scientific theory as pure theory. Will those formally valid conclusions have a binding force on nature? Will they be binding for me if I choose to use a different language? My answer is a decided No. That is why I assert the futility of all argumentation. Philosophy proper is not concerned with the establishment of the truth or falsehood of any propositions, but with the creation of meaningful universes of discourse under which the givennesses of the phenomenal world and of experience obtain intelligibility.

Professor Honderich affirms that “no general proposition of interest has greater inductive and empirical support than that all events whatever, including the choices or decisions and the like, have explanations.” I will only make three marginal remarks in passing: (1) “inductive and empirical support” does not take us far; (2) “choices or decisions and the like” are smuggled in without justification; as I have been asserting all the while, choice and deciding are not to be identified with free will; (3) what we mean by events having “explanations” is just what the whole question is about. If “events have explanations” is taken to mean that events satisfy the requirement of rationality that is fully consistent with the claim of free will. Only when “explanations” are understood as implying predetermination is there a problem.

Honderich argues with obvious heat against Quantum Theory and affirms that quantum events “are theoretical entities in a special sense of that term, not events.” Is not all scientific theory in the same predicament? Scientists of the first calibre were quite happy to work with ether, with gravitation, with indivisible atoms, with infinite space, and in our own day with the ‘singularity’ of the Big Bang. (I am not a scientist or historian of science, else I could have given more telling examples.)

Honderich enlists the support of the Philosophy of Mind or, more accurately, the philosophers of mind. He tells us that “in the Philosophy of Mind ... there is nothing at all about what ... is the unique fact of our consciousness and mental activity and so on.” Quite naturally.

Philosophy of Mind was instituted as a study of the mind as object; the mind as object is a phenomenal process, that is, phenomena conjoined in the mind of the researcher in the form of causal chains.

Philosophers of mind use the mind in their studies, but they never study the mind; they study a shadow of the mind. This is something I have been harping on so often that I do not want to go further into it here.

**TED HONDERICH:
“HOW FREE ARE YOU”**

If I understand Professor Honderich correctly, his position may be outlined as follows: (1) there are grounds for accepting determinism as true; (2) there are cogent arguments against Compatibilism; (3) there are cogent arguments against Incompatibilism. To escape the dilemma, Honderich offers his doctrine of Attitudinism: we are to inquire into what attitudes towards our own behaviour and the behaviour of others follow from our acceptance or rejection of determinism. Does this amount to saying that our philosophical convictions should be decided by a pragmatic criterion? I am not quite sure that I truly understand Honderich's position. Although it would seem that the two of us are on common ground in waiving the Compatibilism *versus* Incompatibilism controversy as irrelevant to the philosophical problem of free will, my reasons are different from his. I maintain that causal

determinism is a scientific postulate which, in common with all objective science, does not yield philosophical truth or philosophical understanding, and hence the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of the postulate with the philosophical idea of free will does not arise in the first place.

Honderich says you can reflect about your past life and “fall into no uncertainty whatever about the proposition that everything that happened did have an explanation in the ordinary and indeed the only real sense. That is, it was an ordinary effect.” Honderich’s “ordinary sense” is decidedly not the “only real sense” of explanation. Permit me to designate this the empirical presumption – namely, that to ‘explain’ can only mean to give an account in terms of the fictions of cause and effect – and to add that it is a presumption that I find no reason to accept. Let us not haggle about a word; what the neurons in my brain do may, in a certain usage, be said to ‘explain’ my behaviour, but I contend that it can never make me understand that behaviour: the only way to understand my or someone else’s behaviour is to consider the ideals, goals, dreams, values, that were behind that behaviour — and I will not try to refine on the metaphor in ‘behind’,

because all refinement will necessarily be dressed in other metaphors, and all metaphor, all determinate speech, will necessarily be found wanting.

Honderich seems to reach out towards the hope that “the true resolution of the problem” may be found “in metaphysics and epistemology, these being understood as philosophical concerns with the nature of reality and our part in it and our role in it.” In pursuit of this hope, Honderich advances his doctrine of Perceptual Consciousness as Existence. In my opinion, this could have been developed into a major system on the grand scale. As Honderich himself says, it is “no longer English philosophy ... It is high reasoning or deep thinking, assigned earlier to French and German philosophy.” Could have been developed, I say, except that Honderich remains too English to escape the empirical outlook and throw off the shackles of the presuppositions of the scientific outlook. A fundamental metaphysical approach is only possible when we realize the radical difference between scientific and philosophical thinking.

It is such a pity that English thinkers are so allergic to ‘high reasoning or deep thinking’; you wouldn’t believe it by looking at English poetry, it is as if English thinkers and English poets belonged

to two nations with different cultures! Even A. N. Whitehead stopped short of a full-fledged metaphysical vision.

PART FOUR

CONCLUSION

Plato spoke of the endless battle between the Gods who find reality in the mind and the Giants who find reality in the perceptible world (*Sophist*, 245e-246e). Around the seventeenth century Europe had a re-birth, and, with the eyes of a new-born babe, was all taken up by the surrounding world. Even the Rationalists, who were all for subjecting everything to reason, were too busy exploring the outer world with their minds to pay much attention to the inner reality of those minds. The Empiricists completed the banishment of the mind, and it was only natural that Dr Johnson should find the refutation of Bishop Berkeley in a stone. Kant came to the rescue and reinstated the reality of God, the soul, and the free will in the inner citadel of Practical Reason. But the world-oriented habit of mind was too strong. It was felt that unless those

realities could be objectified and re-discovered in the outer world, their reality would be compromised. That is the root of the problem. Thus the pseudo-problem of free will was re-fuelled by the scientific superstition of causal determinism when the theological superstition of divine pre-ordination was fading.

For a solution to the problem we have to go back to the teaching of Plato: What we find in the mind is the whole of reality; what is outside the mind is a mere shadow, and all 'knowledge' relating to the shadows of the phenomenal world is, strictly speaking, opinion and conjecture. Our minds, our will, our purposive activity are the reality we know directly, immediately, self-evidently. Turning our eyes away from this reality to the outer world, we are inevitably engrossed in all the interminable quandaries that have kept and are keeping philosophers fruitlessly busy.

But Plato's portrayal of the ideal world as presented in his early dialogues leaves something to be desired. We seem to be left with too static an impression of the intelligible Forms. Yet the reality we know in ourselves is not static; it is creative. It is in creativity that we find freedom. And creativity is a reality we know in ourselves, as immediately and self-evidently as we know the reality of our minds.

All parties to the free will controversy have in mind choice and deliberation. These are always conditioned by antecedents though that does not rule out autonomy and openness to the influence of principles, ideals, aims, and purposes, admonition and edification. But true freedom is other than that. It is evident, self-evident, not only in heroic deeds, deeds of love, and the works of creative intelligence in art, poetry, and philosophy, but equally in our simplest voluntary acts: I walk, I speak, I take a sip of coffee because I will, and the word ‘because’ here sits uncomfortably, imposed by linguistic convention. Freedom is creative spontaneity.

If the hypotheses of our objective sciences find it difficult to accommodate the idea of creativity, so much the worse for those hypotheses. That only shows they are too narrow and too shallow: in their defence it has to be said that they have to be narrow and shallow if they are to serve their purpose. But that is no reason why we should belie the inner self-evidence of our moral and creative experience.

Free will is the autonomous affirmation of the reality of intelligent being in creative activity. An act of love is spontaneous, free, and creative. An act of artistic creation is spontaneous, free, and

creative. The antecedents of the act are sufficient to the intelligibility of the outcome, but the outcome was not contained in them; the act brings into the world something new. My creative intelligence is my reality, my freedom, my dignity, my whole worth. This is not a proposition that has to be proved: this is a vision that has to be lived, and when lived shines in the self-evidence of its reality. If we find this difficult to believe or even to conceive, it is only because we have lost the innocence of the inward vision.

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